

Amendments to the Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A turbocharger comprising a center housing, a variable nozzle device, and an exhaust housing being mechanically and/or thermally decoupled from the variable nozzle device, wherein the variable nozzle device comprises a circumferential arrangement of vanes interposed between a nozzle ring and an outer ring integrally formed with a peripheral ring fitted on said nozzle ring and coupled to said center housing,

wherein the peripheral ring is radially and axially spaced from the exhaust housing, so that any contact between the exhaust housing and the peripheral ring is avoided,

whereby transmission of a mechanical or thermal load from the exhaust housing to the variable nozzle device does not occur.

2. (Cancelled)

3. (Previously Presented) The turbocharger of Claim 1, wherein said exhaust housing is mounted directly to a center housing carrying a shaft with a turbine wheel, so that both housings define an inner space in which said variable nozzle device and said turbine wheel are located.

4. (Previously Presented) The turbocharger of Claim 3, wherein said exhaust housing comprises a gas inlet portion attached to said center housing and a gas outlet portion encompassing with an axially extending clearance a gas outlet portion of the variable nozzle device.

5. (Previously Presented) The turbocharger of Claim 4, wherein the gas inlet portion of the exhaust housing comprises a flange member axially abutted via a sealing element to the center housing and mounted thereto by a fastening member.

6. (Previously Presented) The turbocharger of Claim 4, further comprising a sealing system for avoiding a gas leakage between the exhaust housing and the variable nozzle device.

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7. (Previously Presented) The turbocharger of Claim 6, wherein the sealing system comprises a circumferential recess formed in said gas outlet portion of the variable nozzle device and containing a piston ring, characterized by at least one further circumferential recess formed in said gas outlet portion of said exhaust housing and opened to said axially extending clearance between the gas inlet side of said exhaust housing and the piston ring.

8. (Previously Presented) The turbocharger of Claim 1, wherein said vanes are pivotally supported on the nozzle ring, said nozzle ring being axially urged by the peripheral ring against an annular disc member supported on said center housing.

9. (Previously Presented) The turbocharger of Claim 1, wherein said gas inlet portion of the exhaust housing encompasses with a further axially extending clearance the peripheral ring of said variable nozzle device.

10. (Previously Presented) The turbocharger of Claim 1, wherein said peripheral ring is abutted against the same sealing element via which the flange member of the exhaust housing is secured on the center housing.